

DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 098 867

HE 006 044

AUTHOR Shapiro, Paul S.
TITLE Information Needs for Student and Public Choice in Postsecondary Education.
INSTITUTION Office of the Assistant Secretary for Education (DHEW), Washington, D.C.
PUB DATE 31 May 74
NOTE 12p.; Policy development staff paper
EDRS PRICE MF-\$0.75 HC-\$1.50 PLUS POSTAGE
DESCRIPTORS Academic Standards; Accountability; *Accreditation (Institutions); Consumer Education; Educational Accountability; *Higher Education; Information Needs; Post Secondary Education; *State Standards; Student Rights

ABSTRACT

There has been an increasing movement toward consumer protection in recent years, sparked by a few crusaders, a better educated public, and changing socioeconomic conditions. What is new is the interest being generated under the rubric of consumer protection in postsecondary education. This conception of consumer protection deals almost exclusively with process and procedures. Attempts can be made to influence and even coerce institutions to use fair advertising practices, but unless acceptable methodologies are available for accurately representing what postsecondary institutions are and purport to do for their students, such efforts are likely to prove futile and perhaps even ephemeral. Consumer protection as described above implies accountability mainly to individual students. There is also a broader accountability to the public that may also be construed as consumer protection, since there is such a tremendous investment of public and private funds in postsecondary education. The appropriateness of current accrediting practices for determining federal eligibility has come into question. While institutional eligibility is an important part of the federal concern, an even more important guiding principle derives from the policy of providing financial aid directly to students. Types of assessment, assessment techniques, communicating assessment information, and creating postsecondary prospectus are included. (Author/PG)

ED 098867

INFORMATION NEEDS FOR STUDENT AND PUBLIC
CHOICE IN POSTSECONDARY EDUCATION

OFFICE OF THE ASSISTANT SECRETARY
FOR EDUCATION

POLICY DEVELOPMENT STAFF PAPER *

Paul S. Shapiro
May 31, 1974

#####

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH,
EDUCATION & WELFARE
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF
EDUCATION

THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRO-
DUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM
THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGIN-
ATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS
STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRE-
SENT OFFICIAL NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF
EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY.

*This paper has been prepared for discussion purposes only.
It does not represent a policy statement by the Assistant
Secretary for Education or any other component of the
Department of Health, Education, and Welfare.

HE 006044

INTRODUCTION

There has been an increasing movement toward consumer protection in recent years, sparked by a few crusaders, a better educated public and changing socio-economic conditions. This movement has extended into education in a number of ways. At the elementary and secondary levels, community control and vouchers are two manifestations of attempts to more fully assert consumer interest. At the postsecondary level, consumer activity primarily began and was spurred by situations of outright fraud and other misleading practices associated with proprietary institutions and their use of the Guaranteed Student Loan Program. Concerns of this type are not new, however, for there were similar problems after World War II with illegal or unethical attempts by institutions to enroll veterans entitled to G.I. Bill benefits.

What is new is the breadth of interest now being generated under the rubric of consumer protection in postsecondary education. This became clear at the recent conference on this topic sponsored jointly by the Education Commission of the States and the Federal Interagency Committee on Education. If there was a single focus of that conference it was on the student as the primary consumer, which leads to such issues as student rights, redress of their grievances and even student involvement in collective bargaining on campus. Since such issues affect traditional colleges as much as or more than proprietary schools, consumer protection can now be said to be germane of all of postsecondary education.

This conception of consumer protection deals almost exclusively with process and procedures. Federal agencies, including HEW, the Federal Trade Commission and the Postal Service, perform or are expected to perform quasi or actual regulation and even prosecution in the individual or public interest. State agencies may be expected to perform some of the same functions through the licensing process. Consumer groups are registering complaints and seeking redress of grievances. Students are advised to solve difficulties on the local level -- i.e., on the campus--but have also gone to court. These are actions which deal far more with cure than prevention and with individuals than the public.

Attempts can be made to influence and even coerce institutions to use fair advertising practices, but unless acceptable methodologies are available for accurately representing what postsecondary institutions are and purport to do for their students, such efforts are likely to prove futile and perhaps even ephemeral. While it may be slower to begin with, it should prove more effective in the long run to begin developing such methodologies.

Consumer protection as described above implies accountability mainly to individual students. There is also a broader accountability to the public which may also be construed as consumer protection since there is such a tremendous investment of public and private funds in postsecondary education. One of the keystones of such investment has come to be the accreditation process. The Federal government in particular has come to rely on accreditation for eligibility for funds, both directly to postsecondary institutions and indirectly through

student aid.

The appropriateness of current accrediting practices for determining Federal eligibility has come into question for a number of reasons. The Newman Task Force pointed out that the Federal government has gotten itself into the position of essentially relying on private bodies to make judgments for it on which institutions should be eligible for funds. Moreover, that the judgments were on the basis of presumed measures of institutional quality that are difficult to substantiate. The Orlans report has more recently also asserted that any implied standards which the accrediting associations and the Office of Education as their quasi-regulator use are ineffective in distinguishing quality among institutions.

Past and present officers of the two major accrediting organizations -- the Federation of Regional Accrediting Commissions on Higher Education and the National Commission on Accrediting, which are now about to merge -- have also indicated their dissatisfaction with the current state of this relationship. They have recommended either developing an alternative to accreditation as the only means of determining eligibility or an improvement of present accrediting practices. The Federation, through one of its member associations (the North Central Association of Colleges and Secondary Schools), is trying to alter the self-study requirement for accreditation so that it is based more on outputs than inputs.

While institutional eligibility is an important part of the Federal

concern, an even more important guiding principle derives from the policy of providing financial aid directly to students. This has been the case with the extremely large programs of Social Security and Veterans benefits for as long as these programs have existed, but HEW loan and grant programs have now also been turned in this direction. Portable student aid gives a greater power of choice among institutions to the students, but at the same time brings new pressures to bear from the institutions to attract students who have such funds at their disposal.

Such pressures have become particularly acute for certain types of institutions which have felt constrained to compete more strongly for students in order to continue in anything like the financial and programmatic conditions to which they have become accustomed. "Let the buyer beware" is not a position which the Federal government can condone in such a situation. Having created a quasi-market condition, it bears a responsibility for at least ensuring that adequate information is available by which students can decide which institutions to apply to and attend.

What this information should be, how it might differ for different types of institutions and students, and how it can best be transmitted to potential students are complex questions which deserve and will require some considerable effort in order to be answered. While this is clearly an area in which there are many interests at stake, there appears to be an openness among most of the parties concerned to attempt to improve current practice and to accept Federal leadership in doing so.

ASSESSING POSTSECONDARY INSTITUTIONS

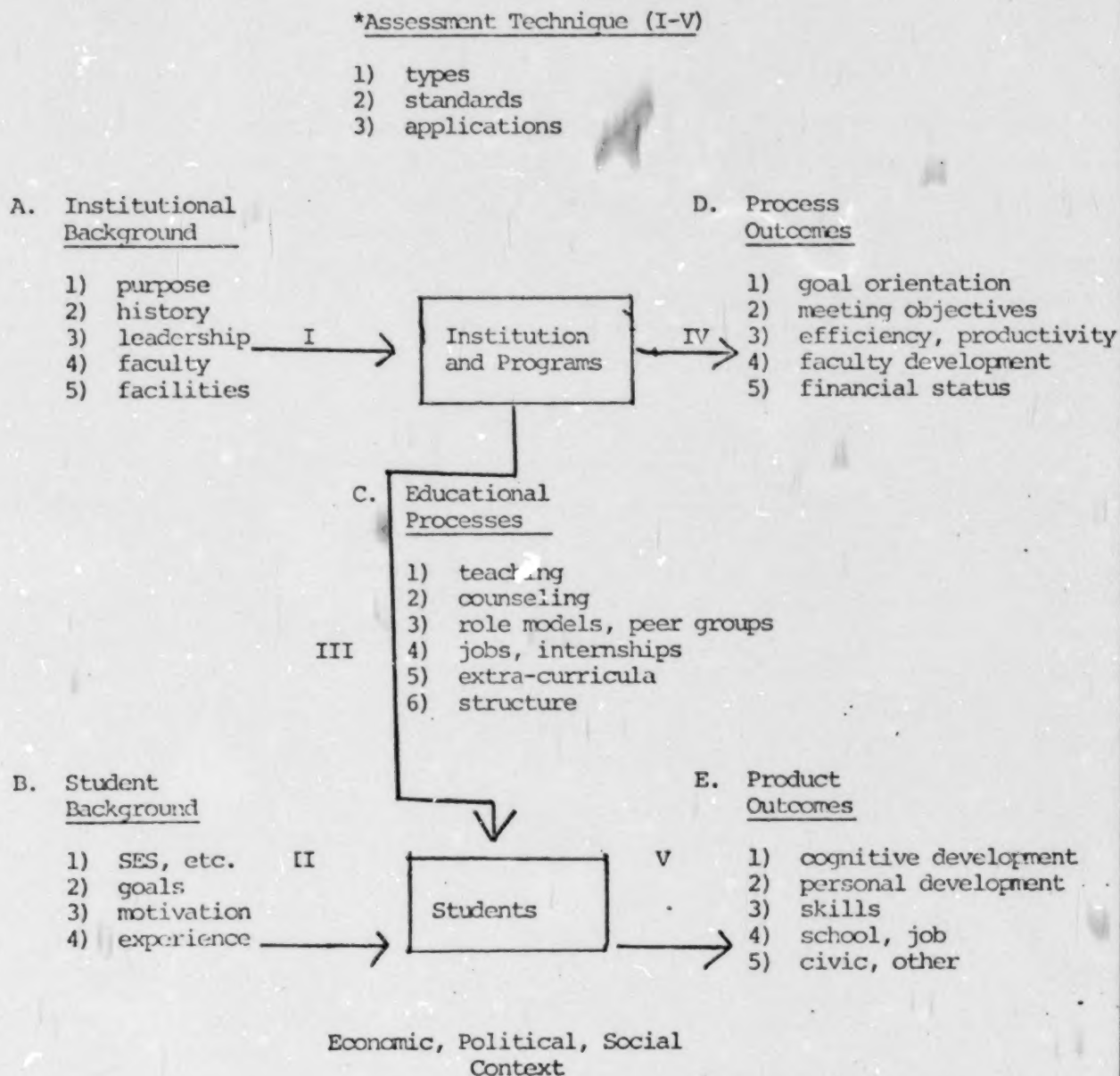
A. Types of Assessment

As indicated in Figure 1, there are at least five types of information which can be used in assessing postsecondary institutions. Most of the information now used for accrediting and other purposes consists of the first two types -- background information on the institution and its students. This is where there is a counting up of faculty degrees and library books and in some sense a sizing up against stated objectives. What there has been very little attention paid to are the process and product outcomes, which might give a picture of how the institution actually performs. Relating the background factors to the outcomes are a series of educational processes, which are usually only partially described and treated as givens without explanation of the likely effects which changes in them can have on all members of the institution.

B. Assessment Techniques

The gathering of assessment information is heavily dependent on the techniques available for doing so. Each of the five types of assessment information has associated with it some typical methods and/or instruments. Self-studies and planning documents are used when information on institutional background needs to be presented. Student background information

Figure 1. Five Types of Information for
Assessing Postsecondary Institutions



*Assessment Technique (Typical Examples)

- I. Self-Study or Planning Document
- II. Tests, Admissions Data
- III. Environmental Scales, Unobstrusive Measures
- IV. Institutional Research
- V. Competency-Based Assessment, Individual Follow-up

is usually described by test scores and other admissions data. Different types of environmental scales and recently some unobtrusive measures (lunchroom conversations, typical graffiti) have been used to obtain a picture of campus life and some aspects of educational processes. There has been a growing trend for institutional research offices on campuses to gather a variety of data of a more administrative or managerial nature which can be related to process outcomes. Very little has been done, however, to follow-up graduates or in any way test the educational effectiveness of institutions by measuring what students have gained through attendance.

C. RESEARCH AND EVALUATION

Aside from these potentially systematic assessments of individual institutions, there is much assessment-related information which derives from two other sources. One is the body of research which has been done on the effects of college attendance, on the factors which affect college attendance, and on other related topics. Some of the techniques for institutional assessment have been developed by this research. Research of this type must continue if the practice of institutional assessment is to be improved. The second source is the wide range of evaluation activities undertaken by individual institutions, by States, by private groups and by the Federal government. These include evaluation of projects on individual campuses (for example, of innovative programs), of departments and institutions, and of Federal programs. There are bodies of general information which could potentially be

communicated about individual institutions or types of institutions.

COMMUNICATING ASSESSMENT INFORMATION

Information about postsecondary institutions is communicated to potential students through college catalogues, written guides, counseling, word-of-mouth, visits and so on. Because most of this information originates with the institutions and is largely of the background type, new types of assessment information are simply not available to students or to those who might like to provide these to them. Neither, as indicated above, are they now available for accreditation, determining Federal eligibility or any other purpose.

What is needed now is a means by which such information can be put out by individual institutions in a format which will allow some judgments to be made about the performance of the institution. While it may not be either possible or desirable to set standards or even specific criteria for making judgments or comparisons, it should at least be possible to identify broad categories of information and some measures within them which would be useful for making decisions for student and public choice. Such information could then be made available through a number of channels to different users for a variety of purposes.

CREATING A POSTSECONDARY PROSPECTUS

From a number of sources has come the suggestion that information

of this type be put in the form of a document which might resemble or serve the purpose of a Securities and Exchange Commission "prospectus." A prospectus is a disclosure statement. It reveals what the current status of the organization is, what its prospects are, and what it purports to provide for an investor.

A postsecondary prospectus need not contain the types of background information now included in catalogues and guides, though it might ultimately influence their content. It ought to concentrate on the three types of assessment information which have so far been largely neglected -- product outcomes, educational processes and process outcomes. There appears to have been enough work done in each of these areas that a number of developmental activities could be begun. These could include:

- (1) developing the format for a postsecondary prospectus which could be tested at a variety of institutions.

- (2) Improving and testing out techniques and instruments for obtaining the assessment information to be included in a prospectus.

- (3) Exploring counseling and other mechanisms for providing such information to students when they most need it.

- (4) Supporting research relating to the above so that over time more fundamental improvements may be possible.

Most reactions to date have been highly supportive. This is seen as a significant Federal initiative; one which other sectors might have performed, but have not and are extremely unlikely to undertake. To do a creditable job adequate funding will be required for developing the prospectus, testing it out, improving techniques and supporting research. This can be done in phases and multiple sources of funding may prove wise and necessary.

Individuals Contacted To Date

- | | | |
|------------------------|-----------------------|------------------------|
| 1. George Arnstein | 27. Dorothy Harrison | 52. Eldon Park |
| 2. Leonard Baird | 28. Ann Heiss | 53. Gail Parks |
| 3. Fred Balderston | 29. William Herman | 54. Richard Peterson |
| 4. Charles Bidwell | 30. Harold Hodgkinson | 55. David Riesman |
| 5. Harold Bierman | 31. John Holland | 56. Janet Ruyle |
| 6. Benjamin Bloom | 32. Hans Jenny | 57. Anne Scott |
| 7. John Brown | 33. Lawrence Kohlberg | 58. Gloria Scott |
| 8. Norman Burns | 34. Eileen Kuhns | 59. Michael Scriven |
| 9. James Cass | 35. Hugh Lane | 60. William Selden |
| 10. Hale Champion | 36. Al Loeb | 61. K. Fred Skousen |
| 11. Burton Clark | 37. Samuel McCandless | 62. Norvel Smith |
| 12. James Coleman | 38. Patrick McCarthy | 63. Virginia Smith |
| 13. Gerald Conchlin | 39. David McClelland | 64. Fred Thompson |
| 14. J. Douglas Conner | 40. T.R. McConnell | 65. Ralph Tyler |
| 15. Theodore Cooper | 41. Joseph McGuire | 66. John Vasconcellos |
| 16. Thomas Corcoran | 42. Ward Mason | 67. Dean Whitla |
| 17. Joseph Cronin | 43. Leland Medsker | 68. Arthur Wise |
| 18. Frank Dickey | 44. Paul Mertins | 69. Frank Wuest |
| 19. David Drew | 45. Otmer Milton | 70. D. Parker Young |
| 20. Douglas Dillenbeck | 46. Darrell Morris | 71. Richard Millard |
| 21. Alden Dunham | 47. Kenneth O'Brien | 72. Lewis Solmon |
| 22. Russ Edgerton | 48. Robert O'Neil | 73. Salvatore Corrallo |
| 23. Daniel Finn | 49. Harold Orlans | |
| 24. David Goslin | 50. C. Robert Pace | |
| 25. Mal Gross | 51. J. Boyd Page | |
| 26. Fred Harcleroad | | |